



# SWITCHBOARD

Natural Resources Defense Council Staff Blog

Kaid Benfield's Blog

## The country's best suburban retrofit: Bethesda Row reaches maturity



Posted January 28, 2010 in [Green Enterprise](#). [Living Sustainably](#)

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OK, maybe I haven't seen *all* the country's remade suburban neighborhoods, though I have seen or researched many. Naming one as "the best" is highly subjective anyhow. But Bethesda Row is definitely the best suburban retrofit I know, and I think you'd be hard pressed to find one better.

Great retrofit examples are important, because the remaking of outdated portions of suburbia into more coherent and sustainable places is a critical and growing frontier for smart growth. With motivation and skill, this can be done in a way that preserves the most important qualities that people seek in a suburban environment. As I have written in the past, this is exactly what was done in the case of Arlington, Virginia, where substantial commercial and residential development has been added in a major transit corridor without disturbing nearby single-family neighborhoods, which remain relatively serene, and without adding significant automobile traffic.



But none of the new development in Arlington, as good as it is, can match that of Bethesda Row, a private development (built with public planning and infrastructure assistance) that has been under way for over a decade in another of DC's inner-ring suburbs, Bethesda, Maryland. For our 2001 book *Solving Sprawl*, my co-author Jutka Terris proposed the project's inclusion, and had this to say about its serendipitous beginning:

*"It all started in 1994, thanks to a strategically oriented balcony, where a group of employees of Federal Realty Investment Trust's Bethesda office were taking a break. They had been searching for a model project to pioneer the real estate investment company's new strategy of acquiring large multiblock sites and turning them into vibrant shopping and entertainment districts. "Why not here?" someone asked, pointing to an area visible from the balcony. The area had a strong potential customer base, and it already contained*



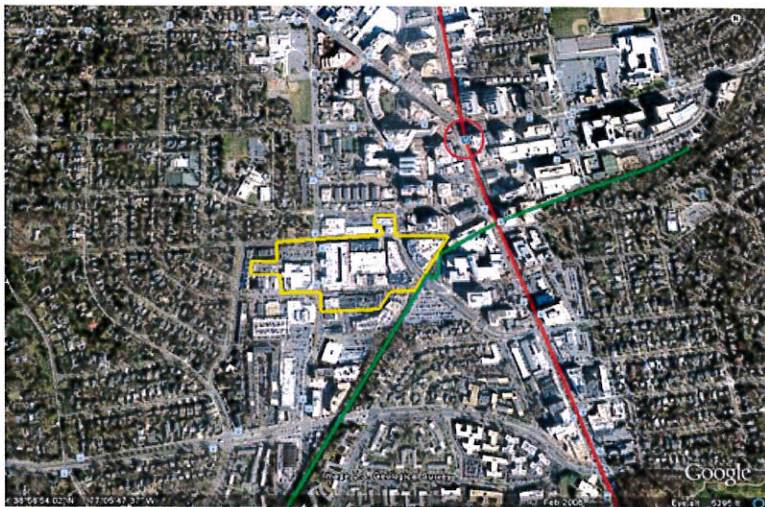
*a public garage. It was also accessible by Metro, the regional subway system."*



By the time we published, Federal Realty had already taken eight acres along a badly faded automobile-oriented suburban strip and turned them into 388,000 square feet of immensely walkable and amenity-laden shops, offices, public spaces, restaurants, and more. In the years since, the company has added another 140,000 square feet of entertainment venues, more commercial and public space, a residential component, and the area's best suburban pedestrian concourse. There's a major supermarket, a farmers' market every Sunday, and numerous [lively festivals](#) during the year. The neighborhood is always animated, but seldom feels crowded. The best part, in my view? Apart from the up-to-date names on many of the shops, Bethesda Row feels like it could have been there for decades.



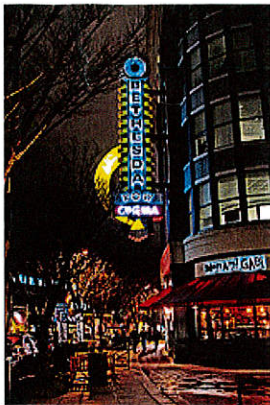
In addition to its amazing public spaces (which also include a highly popular fountain area), one of Bethesda Row's greatest assets is its transportation infrastructure. Yes, there's the parking garage (and some nearby surface lots that will be developed), but in my opinion parking facilities are important for a suburb. And there is hardly any traffic congestion, in large part because the neighborhood is also steps away from a major rail transit station, multiple bus lines, and the offices, apartments and condos of Bethesda's downtown. A heavily used bike and pedestrian trail also runs right through the heart of the development. (See photo above.)



On the satellite image (taken in February 2008), Bethesda Row's boundary is in yellow. The heart of Bethesda's suburban downtown is to the north. The red line denotes the below-ground Metro route, with the station circled; look closely for small blue squares marking the location of bus stops. The green line is the Capital Crescent bike and pedestrian trail, which originates in DC's Georgetown neighborhood, some seven miles to the south. One can also see several single-family neighborhoods within an easy walk from the development. But, wait, it's only going to get better: Metro's Purple Line light rail link between Bethesda and suburban Prince George's County to the east will also soon have a stop nearby.

I suppose it must be said that the success of Bethesda Row has been aided immensely by the affluence of its Montgomery County and northwest DC surroundings, and its location in a region that has not suffered nearly as much from the recession as elsewhere. It has had some advantages that many suburbs lack. I would like it even better if it had a good affordable housing component. But the project's





commercial and residential activity might easily have gone to other locations and contributed to sprawl had Bethesda's leaders not welcomed the density and walkability of the project. and had Federal Realty's commitment to excellence in vision, design and materials been less strong. This has been an outstanding project and a success from day one.

Bethesda Row has won a number of awards, from such entities as [the federal EPA](#), the [Urban Land Institute](#), and the [National Association of Home Builders](#). I could go on and on, but in this case I think the photos fill out the story much better than additional words would. so enjoy.

*Kaid Benfield writes (almost) daily about community, development, and the environment. For more posts, see [his blog's home page](#).*

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## Comments

**Steve Davis** — Jan 28 2010 10:24 AM

After hearing about Bethesda Row before moving here, I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of the urbanism. Too many of these sorts of projects that are being tossed up here and there (often masquerading as downtowns under the 'lifestyle centers' moniker) have half-baked urban design and feel as plastic as the malls they're replacing. Bethesda does have a feel that some buildings are older than others and the connectivity to the grid makes it feel like part of Bethesda, rather than a walkable shopping mall at its edge. I don't up that far very often, but I've always enjoyed the times I've been there.

Especially the day we went for a bike ride up Beach Drive, across East-West Highway to reach the Capital Crescent Trail to ride back to DC, and stumbled on a big arts festival in the fall. We parked our bikes and ambled about the streets and sidewalks for a couple hours, eating food and looking at arts and crafts. Never occurred to us that we were in "a suburb." :)

**Jill Bellenger** — Jan 28 2010 12:20 PM

Thank you for this wonderful article. I'm a strong proponent for New Urbanism and any neighborhood design that keeps people out of their cars and living healthier lives!

**BeyondDC** — Jan 28 2010 02:45 PM

Bethesda Row is a fabulous development, but I'm not sure it deserves the title "best suburban retrofit" simply because downtown Bethesda hasn't been suburban for a long time. Bethesda Row was less a suburban retrofit than it was simple urban infill, albeit on a multi-block scale.

**Kaid @ NRDC** — Jan 28 2010 03:01 PM

Beyond: my take is that, while what you say is true now, it was much less true in 1994 when the project was conceived. Bethesda is more urban today in part *because* of the innovation brought by Bethesda Row.

**Laurence Aurbach** — Jan 29 2010 12:00 PM

I was just looking at historical aerial photos of Bethesda and remembering the cement plant that used to operate at the corner of Bethesda Ave. and Arlington Rd. I used to see it every day, and I had forgotten about it completely! Funny how urban change for the better obliterates indifferent or ugly memories, while urban change for the worse has a counterreaction of nostalgia.

*Comments are closed for this post.*

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## 100 best places to live and launch

### 5. Bethesda, Md.

**Population:** 59,475

**Pro:** Extremely well-educated labor pool

**Con:** D.C. traffic

Bethesda boasts one of the country's best-educated populations for a city of 50,000 or more: more than 80% of its residents have at least a bachelor's degree. Low crime, rapid job growth and easy access (at least without rush-hour traffic) to airports and downtown Washington D.C. make Bethesda attractive to many entrepreneurs - and business opportunities up the appeal.



COURTESY: FEDERAL REALTY INVESTMENT TRUST

Three of the area's business innovation centers are within six miles of the town.

Not only can tech startups rent the space and share facilities (video

conferencing and the reception area, for instance), the county will provide legal counsel through lawyers at the University of Maryland and fiscal advice from financial services companies. While some owners say that navigating Montgomery County's various regulations can make launching tricky, the county eases the process for eligible firms with tax credits for creating jobs, expanding, and - if you're an artist - simply living and working in Bethesda.

The city also is a foodie hub, with over 250 restaurants. Every year, thousands of guests attend the annual Taste of Bethesda festival, where they're treated to dishes from dozens of local restaurants and music performances on four stages. -Kelsey Abbott

**Interactive map: Bethesda, Md.**

**Find homes for sale in Bethesda, Md.**

NEXT: 6. Portland, Ore.

Last updated July 02 2008: 11:16 AM ET

Methodology: How we pick the 100 Best

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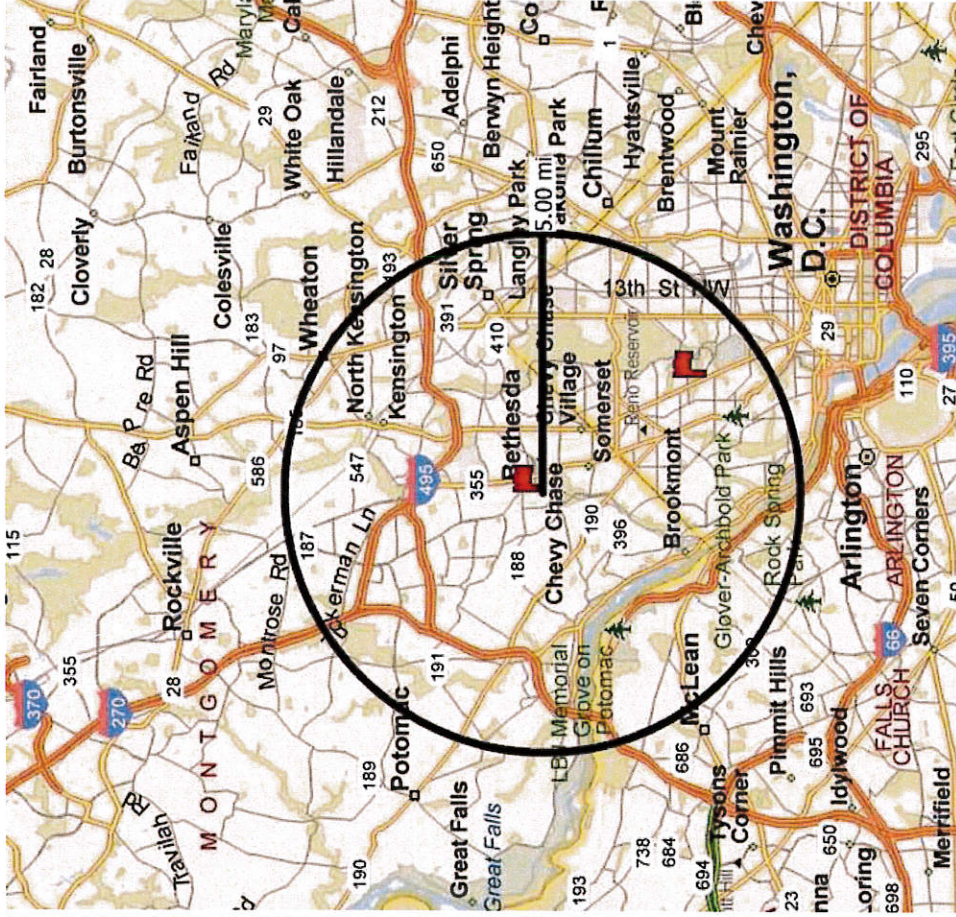
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# BETHESDA ROW

Bethesda, MD

GLA 533,000 SF



## Demographics

### POPULATION

1 mile: 22,611  
3 miles: 139,954  
5 miles: 436,422

### HOUSEHOLDS

1 mile: 10,827  
3 miles: 58,920  
5 miles: 187,422

### DAYTIME POPULATION

1 mile: 35,947  
3 miles: 107,564  
5 miles: 249,139

### MEDIAN AGE

1 mile: 40  
3 miles: 43  
5 miles: 39

### AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD INCOME

1 mile: \$146,005  
3 miles: \$172,118  
5 miles: \$137,345

### MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

1 mile: \$106,318  
3 miles: \$134,221  
5 miles: \$98,595

### COLLEGE EDUCATED

1 mile: 83.4%  
3 miles: 82.4%  
5 miles: 69.0%

Bethesda Row is located in Montgomery County, at the intersection of Bethesda Avenue and Arlington Road in Bethesda, MD. This property has a total of 533,000 square feet and 298 parking spaces. The population in a 3 mile radius is approximately 139,954 with an average household income of \$172,118. The property includes a Giant, Sweetgreen, Lulu Lemon, Ginger, Raku, Sassanova, Mon Ami Gabi, Lebanese Taverna, The Apple Store, Aveda, Lucy, Redwood Restaurant and Bar, Bluemercury, Cafe Deluxe, Jaleo, Austin Grill, Landmark Theatre, Rio Grande, Urban Country and Barnes & Noble among many others.



## BETHESDA ROW

7115 Arlington Road Bethesda Ave  
Bethesda, MD 20814

FOR LEASING INFORMATION, CONTACT:

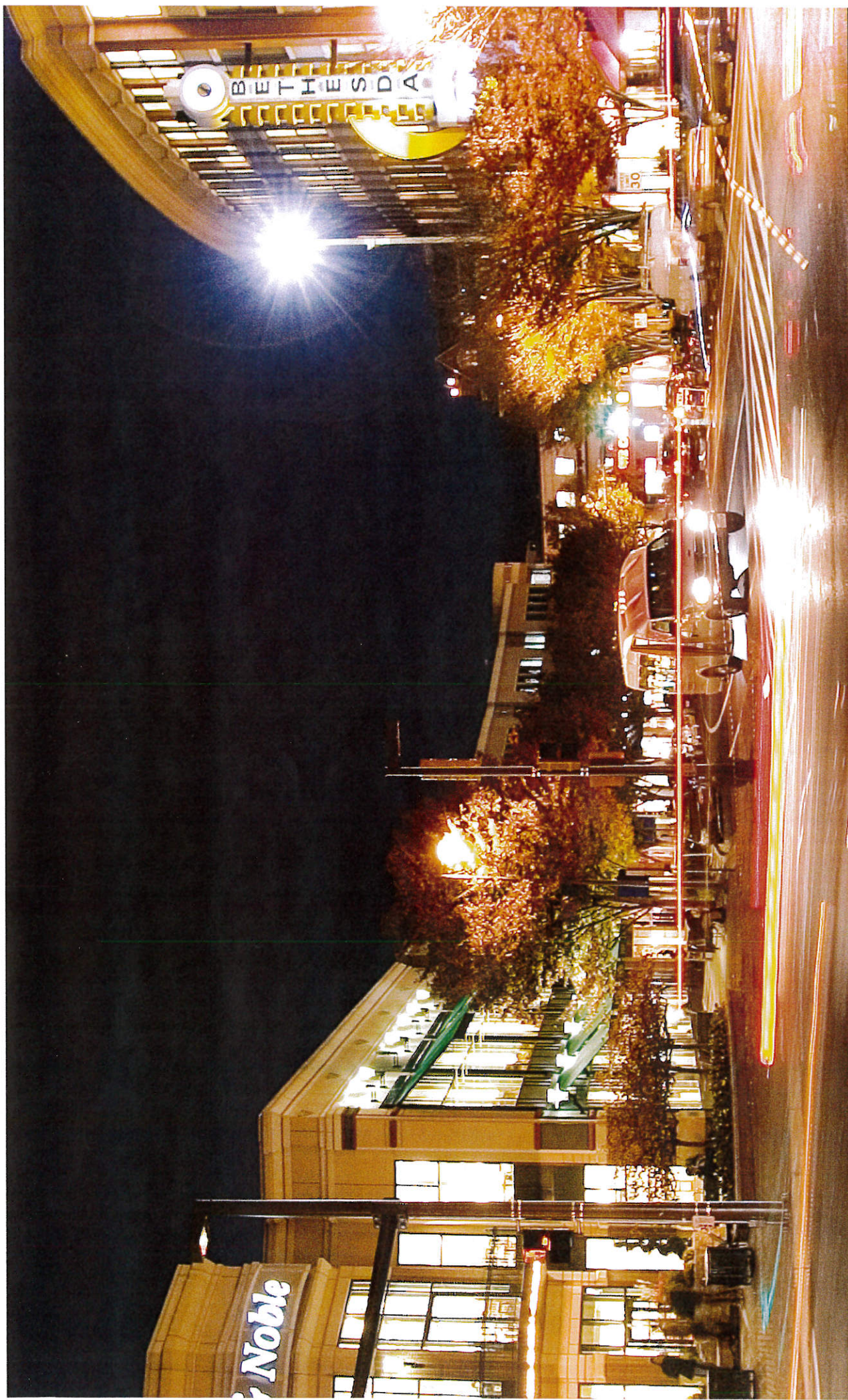
**Ralph Ours**

rous@federalrealty.com  
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UPSTAIRS  
AT BETHESDA ROW



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The area's brightest shopping destination—right outside your door. The best collection of restaurants and cafés—just downstairs. And the ultimate urban convenience—close to Metro, major roads and more—at your feet. Directly over all the excitement of Bethesda Row, there's a new place to move up to: Upstairs at Bethesda Row. Uptown apartment living that's decidedly upscale. Definitely upbeat. And completely up to the minute.



### APARTMENT HOME TYPES

- ONE BEDROOM
- ONE BEDROOM/DEN
- TWO BEDROOM
- TWO BEDROOM/DEN

### LOFTS

- ONE BEDROOM/DEN
- TWO BEDROOM
- TWO BEDROOM/DEN

### RESIDENCE AMENITIES

- 9-FOOT CEILINGS
- WOOD BLINDS
- HARDWOOD FLOORS IN LIVING AND DINING AREAS
- FULLY WIRED FOR TELECOMMUNICATIONS
- WALK-IN CLOSETS
- WASHER AND DRYER
- GRANITE COUNTERS
- STAINLESS STEEL APPLIANCES
- GAS RANGE
- GOURMET CHEF'S ISLAND\*
- CERAMIC TILE IN BATHS
- DOUBLE SINKS IN BATHS\*
- BUILT-IN COMPUTER NOOK\*
- PATIO/BALCONY\*
- PALLADIAN WINDOWS WITH PANORAMIC VIEWS\*

\*in select residences

### BUILDING FEATURES

- RESIDENTS-ONLY GARAGE PARKING
- OPEN-AIR TERRACE
- STATE-OF-THE-ART FITNESS CENTER WITH MP3 PLUG-IN CAPABILITIES
- CONCIERGE
- RESIDENTS-ONLY ELECTRONIC ACCESS
- RESIDENTS' LOUNGE AND MEDIA CENTER
- ON-SITE STORAGE AVAILABLE

### WALK TO

- METRO
- GIANT FOOD
- CAPITAL CRESCENT TRAIL
- SHOPPING
- DINING
- MOVIES
- NIGHTLIFE
- LIVE ENTERTAINMENT
- GALLERIES



**UPSTAIRS**  
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FAX 301.654.5549  
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## *Upstairs at Bethesda Row*

### *Signature Services*

#### 24 Hour Package Retrieval

*An Upstairs at Bethesda Row Concierge is available for your convenience 24 hours a day for you to retrieve any packages you may have awaiting for you.*

#### Soapy Joes- Valet Dry Cleaning/Laundry Service

*Soapy Joe's provide professional, valet dry cleaning and wash-and-fold laundry services with weekday pickup and drop off at the Concierge Desk for your convenience.*

#### Home Away from Home

*Away from home? Upstairs at Bethesda Row staff is here to help! Whether you need care for your small animal companion to a helping hand with your green life. Don't let your mailbox overflow, return to find your mail waiting for you in your home! We know your time and personal belongings are precious and we are here to lend a helping hand!*

#### 24 Hour Maintenance Guarantee

*Upstairs at Bethesda Row Maintenance Team will address your service request within a 24 hour time period.*

#### Full Service Concierge

*24 hour/7 days per week there's a Concierge Staff on site to address any questions or concerns regarding any Signature Services.*

#### Guest Suite Rental

*Upstairs at Bethesda Row offers a comfortable living accommodation onsite (\$200 nightly) for any resident with family or friends in need of a temporary living arrangement.*

#### UBR Residents Lounge

*Upstairs at Bethesda Row offers free 24 hour computer, internet and wi-fi access in a luxury TV Media Lounge.*

#### UBR Fitness Center

*Upstairs at Bethesda Row offers 24 hour access to our state of the art Fitness Center.*

#### Resident Advantage

*Individual resident discounts offered at local participating vendors.*

#### Monthly Events Calendar

*A monthly social event calendar to keep residents informed of all in house events as well as activities in the Bethesda/DC Metropolitan area.*



*Upstairs at Bethesda Row*  
*Signature Services*

*Uber Cab Service*

Uber is our preferred cab/taxi vendor. They will provide each UBR resident with a complimentary first ride (up to a \$20 value).

*Mobile Car Detailing*

UBR has partnered with Eco Safe Auto Mobile Detailing to afford our residents a severely discounted cost. They come to the building, so it's a most convenient service.

*Shoe Repair*

Willie's Shoe Repair will provide our residents with a pickup and delivery shoe shining and leather repair service. Residents have their own personal accounts and simply drop off their shoes or other leather goods at the Concierge Desk.

*REDWOOD Restaurant and Bar Room Service*

The service will be provided exclusively by the restaurant Redwood. Our residents will have their own separate UBR specialized room service menu.

*Renewal Rewards Program*

This program provides residents with free/complimentary perks for continuing to reside with us at UBR. The perks increase in value based on your tenure with us.



*Upstairs at Bethesda Row*  
*Core Events*

*Monthly Resident Breakfast*

*Bethesda Bagel sponsors a complimentary Bagel Breakfast every 1st Friday of the month for our UBR Residents*

*Monthly Wines of the World Club*

Residents will gather for wine tastings from different regions around the world

*Monthly Beer Club*

*Enjoy tasting different beers from various regions paired with exotic cheese.*

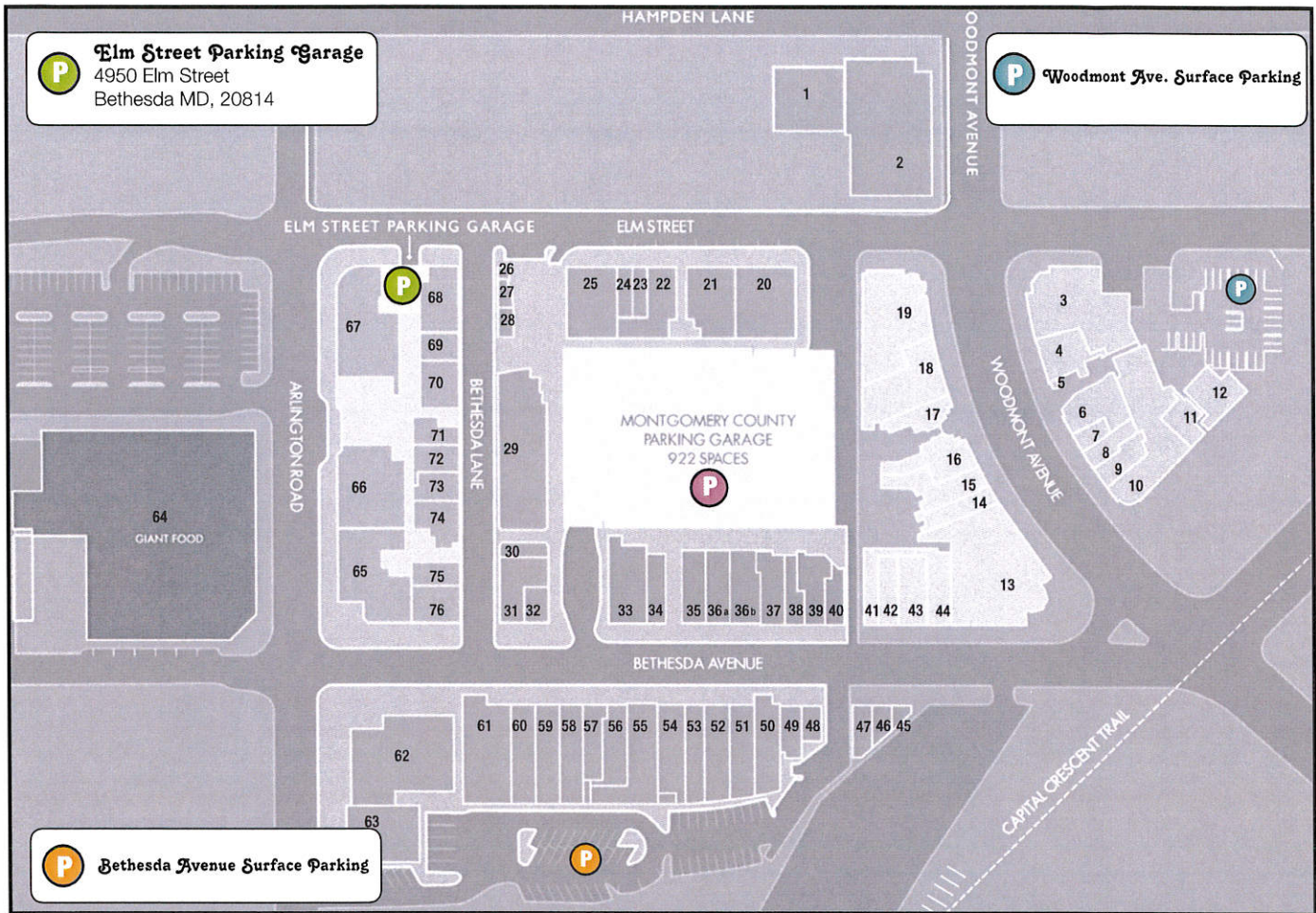
*Trivia Night*

Gather in our Residents Lounge for a friendly game of trivia while socializing with your neighbors.

*Movie Night*

Sit back and relax with popcorn while enjoying a movie screening.





## Dine

- |                             |                                 |                               |                                  |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 19 American Tap Room        | 30 Dolcezza Gelato              | 10 Mon Ami Gabi               | 15 Tandoori Nights               |
| 56 Assaggi Mozzarella Bar   | 47 Dunkin' Donuts               | 18 Mussel Bar                 | 52 Tara Thai                     |
| 25 Boloco                   | 36a Five Guys Burgers and Fries | 33 Nando's Peri Peri          | 2 Taylor Gourmet                 |
| 39 Bethesda Bagels          | 54 Georgetown Cupcake           | 51 Parker's Classic American  | 62 Uncle Julio's Rio Grande Café |
| 20 Café Deluxe              | 11 Haagen-Dazs                  | 2 Pureé Juice Bar             | 2 Vapiano                        |
| 45 Capital Teas             | 3 Jaleo                         | 40 Quartermaine Coffee        | 23 Yogiberry                     |
| 53 Cava Mezze Grill         | 68 Le Pain Quotidien            | 16 Raku                       |                                  |
| 50 Shop House (coming soon) | 67 Lebanese Taverna             | 29 Redwood Restaurant and Bar |                                  |
| 6 Cosi                      | 21 Mamma Lucia's                | 35 Sweetgreen                 |                                  |

## Shop

- |                     |                           |                   |                                |
|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 46 Amethyst         | 58 Francesca's Collection | 14 Luna           | 4 Ritz Camera                  |
| 61 Apple Store      | 73 Ginger                 | 17 My Eye Dr.     | 69 Sassanova                   |
| 9 Vino Volo         | 32 J. McLaughlin          | 59 The North Face | 7 Secolari Olive Oil & Vinegar |
| 13 Barnes & Noble   | 57 Dry Bar                | 43 Paper Source   | 8 Max Brenner                  |
| 31 bluemercury      | 72 Le Creuset             | 44 Petra Boutique | 70 Lou Lou                     |
| 66 City Sports      | 28 Courage b.             | 34 Picture Frame  | 65 Urban Country Designs       |
| 75 Cork & Fork      | 74 Lucy                   | 76 Pink Palm      | 48 Wear It Well                |
| 63 Fitness Resource | 60 lululemon athletica    | 38 Ice Breaker    | 37 Yiro/Tugoo Toys             |

## Spa/Services

- |                          |                        |                     |
|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| 42 Aveda Lifestyle Store | 2 Equinox Fitness Club | 12 Landmark Theatre |
| 24 Blue Zen Nails & Spa  | 64 Giant Foods         | 26 M&T Bank ATM     |
| 71 Bubbles Salon         | 49 Hair Cuttery        | PNC Bank ATM        |
| 5 Bank of America ATM    | 36b Kidville           | 1 Super Cleaners    |



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